

Linking Transition Assessment and Postsecondary Goals

Key Elements in the Secondary Transition Planning Process

Individualized education programs (IEPs) for students with disabilities ages 16 and older must include a transition component. It is important for educators to understand the role transition assessment plays in developing a thorough transition component that includes measurable postsecondary goals, annual IEP goals, transition services, and a course of study. Multi-disciplinary teams should consider questions such as: How can educators use information about a student's strengths, needs, and preferences to develop an effective transition plan? What role does transition assessment play in developing measurable postsecondary goals, annual IEP goals, and transition services for students with disabilities? What is the best way to link a student's annual IEP goals to postsecondary goals?

Capizzi (2008) addressed the need for writing measurable academic individualized education program (IEP) goals for students with disabilities and emphasized the importance of using assessment as a guide for developing these goals. One key component of the IEP process Capizzi did not address is the required addition of a transition component when students with disabilities

turn 16 years of age. At this age, the IEP must include measurable postsecondary goals in the areas of employment, education, and independent living (when appropriate), as well as annual IEP goals and transition services designed to help students prepare for their stated postsecondary goals. In addition, these secondary transition requirements must be based on age-appropriate transition assessment. As a result, transition assessment must be designed to allow educators to identify students' strengths, needs, and preferences, which will guide IEP teams in writing measurable postsecondary goals, related transition services, and annual IEP goals.

The Role of Transition Planning

In 1990, the Individuals With Disabilities Education Act included transition services for students with disabilities for the first time, requiring that students ages 16 and older be provided with coordinated services to address their needs when moving from school to adult life. With the Act's reauthorization in 1997, the focus shifted from simply improving the educational services of students with disabilities to aligning the student's educational program with postsecondary goals in

order to provide students with the necessary skills to become responsible adults (Cameto, 2005). Finally, in 2004, the Individuals With Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA) further strengthened the transition requirements by defining transition services as:

A coordinated set of activities for a student with a disability that is designed to be within a results oriented process that is focused on improving the academic and functional achievement of the child with a disability to facilitate the child's movement from school to post-secondary activities, including postsecondary education, vocational education, integrated employment (including supported employment), continuing and adult education, adult services, independent living, or community participation. (20 U.S.C. § 1401 (602)(34))

In addition, the law requires IEPs to include measurable postsecondary goals that are based on transition assessment in the areas of education, employment, and independent living (i.e., when appropriate; National Center on Secondary Education and Transition, 2007).

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In order to meet IDEA requirements, it is critical to understand the importance of transition planning in the lives of youth with disabilities and their families. Transition planning allows students with disabilities and their families to set goals for postsecondary life, determine related transition services, align annual IEP goals with postsecondary goals, and make necessary agency connections to attain those goals (Test, Aspel, & Everson, 2006).

The primary purpose of transition planning is to clearly define the student's postsecondary goals by assessing and defining student strengths, needs, and desires in order to develop an appropriate curricular plan, including academic and functional coursework and community-based instruction necessary to meet postsecondary goals (Test et al.).

One key component of the transition planning process is transition assessment. Transition assessment allows teachers, families, and agencies opportunities to understand and define a student's strengths, needs, and preferences with regards to postsecondary life. The Division on Career Development and Transition (DCDT) of the Council for Exceptional Children defined *transition assessment* as

the ongoing process of collecting data on the individual's needs, preferences, and interests as they relate to the demands of current and future working, educational, living, and personal and social environments. Assessment data serve as the common thread in the transition process and form the basis for defining goals and services to be included in the IEP. (Sitlington, Neubert, & Leconte, 1997, p. 70)

Therefore, it is logical that transition assessment would be the first step in the process of writing measurable post-

secondary goals, transition services, and annual IEP goals into the IEP.

Meeting the Requirements of Indicator 13

With IDEA 2004, the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) began requiring states to submit data on 20 indicators for Part B (i.e., children with disabilities; ages 3 to 22). These indicators were developed to ensure states were meeting the guidelines of IDEA (U.S. Department of Education, ED, 2008). Indicator 13 is the secondary transition indicator, and requires that the IEP include:



Appropriate measurable postsecondary goals that are annualized and based upon an age appropriate transition assessment, transition services, including courses of study, that will reasonably enable the student to meet those postsecondary goals, and annual IEP goals related to the student's transition services needs. There also must be evidence that the student was invited to the IEP Team meeting where transition services are to be discussed and evidence that, if appropriate, a representative of any participating agency was invited to the IEP Team meeting with the prior consent of the parent or student who has reached the age of majority. (20 U.S.C. 1416(a)(3)(B); OSEP, 2009)

In operationalizing Indicator 13 for data collection, the National Secondary Transition Technical Assistance Center (NSTTAC), in coordination with OSEP, developed an Indicator 13 checklist (see Figure 1) to provide states a tool for collecting data to help meet their annual data reporting requirements (NSTTAC, 2007a). The checklist includes eight items related to transition for students with disabilities. Six components of the checklist are relevant for the purpose of writing measurable postsecondary goals based on transition assessment and aligning postsecondary goals with transition services and annual IEP goals:

1. Is (are) there an appropriate measurable postsecondary goal(s) in this area (i.e., employment, education/training, independent living)?
2. Is (are) the postsecondary goal(s) updated annually?
3. Is there evidence that the measurable postsecondary goal(s) were based on an age appropriate transition assessment?
4. Are there transition services in the IEP that will reasonably enable the student to meet his or her postsecondary goal(s)?
5. Do the transition services include courses of study that will reasonably enable the student to meet his or her postsecondary goal(s)?

6. Is (are) there annual IEP goal(s) related to the student's transition services needs? (NSTTAC, 2009).

Although IDEA requires transition assessment, the use of transition assessment to guide a student's transition planning process varies greatly across districts and schools (Neubert, 2003). A recent survey on states' use and implementation of IDEA transition assessment requirements indicated that state education agencies were in the process of developing guidelines for transition assessment; only five states indicated they had guidelines in place (Morningstar & Liss, 2008). Although there is confusion in the field regarding the guidelines for transition assessment, age-appropriate transition assessment is the necessary first step in creating measurable postsecondary goals that reflect a student's needs, strengths, and preferences.

Transition Assessment as a Guide for Postsecondary Goals

Transition assessment is the ongoing process of collecting data on the student's needs, preferences, and interests as they relate to the demands of current and future working, educational, living, personal, and social environments (Sitlington & Payne, 2004). Transition assessment is the starting point in the transition planning process (see Figure 2) and can help

process entails assessment of self-determination, self-advocacy, vocational, and overall transition skills (Field & Hoffman, 2007; Neubert). Sitlington and Clark suggest that transition assessment should answer three questions:

1. Where is the student presently?
2. Where is the student going?
3. How does the student get there?

Transition assessment is a process that should begin in middle school and continue through high school (Neubert, 2003; Sitlington, 2008). It is ongoing and guides the decision-making process for students and their families as they embark on the journey through high school into adulthood. It is important to use multiple types and levels of assessment and to organize data to make it user-friendly for students, parents, and other support personnel. In addition to involving the student and family in the process, it is equally important to collaborate with adult service providers and postsecondary institutions to make the transition process seamless (Sitlington & Clark, 2007; Sitlington & Payne, 2004).

Although transition assessment can vary in size and form, most commonly it includes measures of vocational interests and skills, self-determination skills, and other transition-related skills (i.e., education/training, independent

One of the goals of transition assessment is to help students make informed decisions about their future lives.

determine present levels of performance, which in turn leads to developing postsecondary goals, transition services, and related annual IEP goals. One of the goals of transition assessment is to help students make informed decisions about their future lives (Neubert, 2003; Sitlington & Payne). It assists students, families, and professionals with the transition planning process by identifying skills necessary for student success in postsecondary environments (Sitlington & Clark, 2007; Sitlington & Payne). The

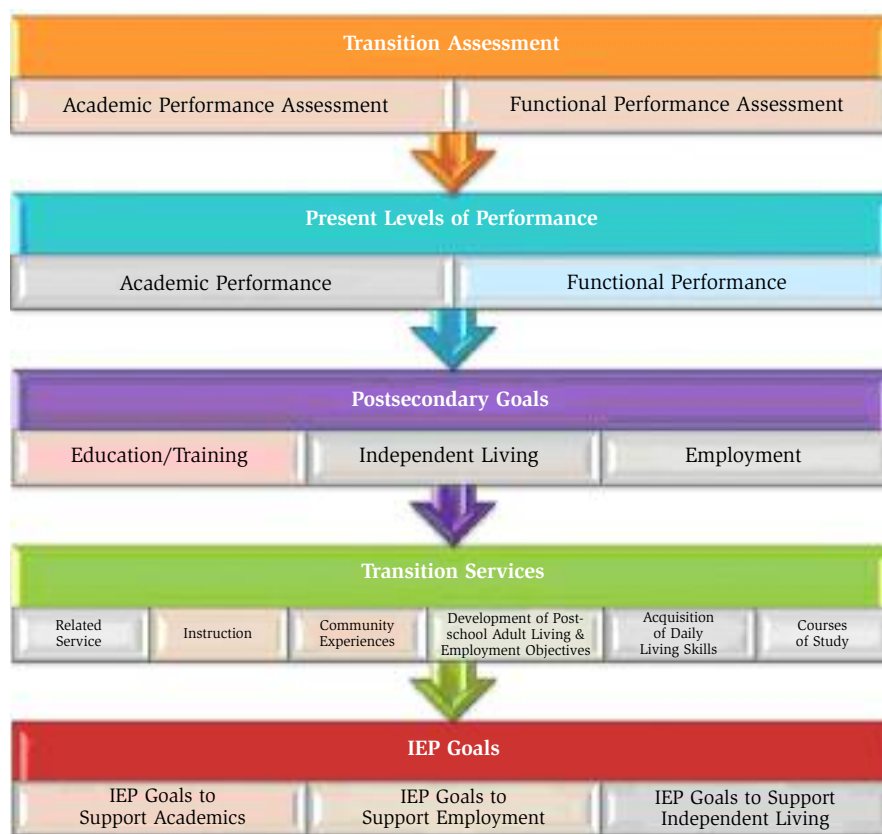
living, recreation/leisure). There are typically two types of transition assessment, formal and informal (NSTTAC, 2007b). Both provide valuable information that can lead to writing measurable postsecondary goals. Many professionals recommend a combination of formal and informal assessment in order to identify the overall picture of a student's preferences, strengths, and needs, and to assist in developing a plan to prioritize the student's transition needs (Field & Hoffman, 2007; Sitlington, 2008).

Figure 1. NSTTAC Indicator 13 Checklist, Form B

| NSTTAC Indicator 13 Checklist: Form B (Enhanced for Professional Development) | | | |
|--|------------------------|------------|-----------------------|
| Percent of youth with IEPs aged 16 and above with an IEP that includes appropriate measurable postsecondary goals that are annually updated and based upon an age appropriate transition assessment, transition services, including courses of study, that will reasonably enable the student to meet those postsecondary goals, and annual IEP goals related to the student's transition services needs. There also must be evidence that the student was invited to the IEP Team meeting where transition services are to be discussed and evidence that, if appropriate, a representative of any participating agency was invited to the IEP Team meeting with the prior consent of the parent or student who has reached the age of majority. (20 U.S.C. 1416(a)(3)(B)) | | | |
| Questions | Postsecondary Goals | | |
| | Education/ Training | Employment | Independent Living |
| 1. Is there an appropriate measurable postsecondary goal or goals in this area? | Y N | Y N | Y N NA |
| Can the goal(s) be counted? Will the goal(s) occur <i>after</i> the student graduates from school? Based on the information available about this student, does (do) the postsecondary goal(s) seem appropriate for this student? • If yes to all three, then circle Y OR if a postsecondary goal(s) is (are) <i>not</i> stated, circle N | | | |
| 2. Is (are) the postsecondary goal(s) updated annually? | Y N | Y N | Y N NA |
| Was (were) the postsecondary goal(s) addressed/updated in conjunction with the development of the current IEP? • If yes, then circle Y OR If the postsecondary goal(s) was (were) <i>not</i> updated with the current IEP, circle N | | | |
| 3. Is there evidence that the measurable postsecondary goal(s) were based on an age appropriate transition assessment? | Y N | Y N | Y N |
| Is the use of transition assessment(s) for the postsecondary goal(s) mentioned in the IEP or evident in the student's file? • If yes, then circle Y OR if <i>no</i> , then circle N | | | |
| 4. Are there transition services in the IEP that will reasonably enable the student to meet his or her postsecondary goal(s)? | Y N | Y N | Y N |
| Is a type of <i>instruction, related service, community experience, or development of employment and other post-school adult living objectives, and if appropriate, acquisition of daily living skills, and provision of a functional vocational evaluation</i> listed in association with meeting the postsecondary goal(s)? • If yes, then circle Y OR if <i>no</i> , then circle N | | | |
| 5. Do the transition services include courses of study that will reasonably enable the student to meet his or her postsecondary goal(s)? | Y N | Y N | Y N |
| Do the transition services include courses of study that align with the student's postsecondary goal(s)? • If yes, then circle Y OR if <i>no</i> , then circle N | | | |
| 6. Is (are) there annual IEP goal(s) related to the student's transition services needs? | Y N | Y N | Y N |
| Is (are) an annual goal(s) included in the IEP that is/are related to the student's transition services needs? • If yes, then circle Y OR if <i>no</i> , then circle N | | | |
| 7. Is there evidence that the student was invited to the IEP Team meeting where transition services were discussed? | Y N | Y N | Y N |
| For the current year, is there documented evidence in the IEP or cumulative folder that the student was invited to attend the IEP Team meeting? • If yes, then circle Y OR if <i>no</i> , then circle N | | | |
| 8. If appropriate, is there evidence that a representative of any participating agency was invited to the IEP Team meeting with the prior consent of the parent or student who has reached the age of majority? | Y N NA | Y N NA | Y N NA |
| For the current year, is there evidence in the IEP that representatives of any of the following agencies/services were invited to participate in the IEP development including but not limited to: <i>postsecondary education, vocational education, integrated employment (including supported employment), continuing and adult education, adult services, independent living or community participation</i> for this post-secondary goal? Was consent obtained from the parent (or student, for a student the age of majority)? • If yes to both, then circle Y • If <i>no</i> invitation is evident and a participating agency is likely to be responsible for providing or paying for transition services and there was consent to invite them to the IEP meeting, then circle N • If it is too early to determine if the student will need outside agency involvement, or no agency is likely to provide or pay for transition services, circle NA • If parent or individual student consent (when appropriate) was not provided, circle NA | | | |
| Does the IEP meet the requirements of Indicator 13? (Circle one) Yes (all Ys or NAs for each item [1–8] on the checklist included in the IEP are circled) or No (one or more Ns circled) | | | |

Note. National Secondary Transition Technical Assistance Center (2009). Indicator 13 Checklist, Charlotte, NC, Author.

Figure 2. Steps in the Transition Planning Process



Formal assessment comprises standardized instruments that have been tested for reliability and validity to support their use (NSTTAC, 2007b). Some common examples of formal assessments include career aptitude and interest assessments, such as the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery (U.S. Department of Defense, 2009); the Kuder® Career Planning System (Kuder, Super, Zytowski, & D'Achiardi-Ressler, 2009); the Self-Directed Search (Holland, 1994); and the Brigance® System (Brigance, 1995). Other types of formal assessments include academic achievement tests (e.g., Woodcock-Johnson III Test of Achievement; Woodcock, McGrew, & Mather, 2001); adaptive behavior scales (e.g., Vineland Adaptive Behavior Scales; Sparrow, Balla, & Chicchetti, 1984); and aptitude tests (e.g., Differential Aptitude Tests; Bennett, Seashore, & Wesman, 1996; personality scales; social skills inventories; NSTTAC, 2007b).

Informal assessment is more subjective in nature and requires multiple

administrations by various observers to strengthen the reliability of the measure. It can take the form of paper-pencil tests, observations, interviews, environmental analysis, and curriculum-based assessments (NSTTAC, 2007b). Examples of paper-pencil assessments include the Transition Planning Inventory (Clark & Patton, 1997); the Life-Centered Career Education Performance and Knowledge Battery (Brolin, 2004); and the Transition Behavior Scale (McCarney & Anderson, 2000; NSTTAC, 2007b; Roessler, 2000). Other valuable methods of informal vocational assessment include observing a student in various employment-related situations, talking with a student about likes and dislikes, and providing opportunities to experience various activities and events (Sitlington, 2008; Sitlington & Clark, 2007; Sitlington & Payne, 2004). Academic and transition skills may also be assessed using curriculum-based assessments such as task analysis, portfolio assessment, work sample analysis, and crite-

rion-referenced tests (Roessler; Sitlington & Clark).

Writing Measurable Postsecondary Goals

After organizing and analyzing transition assessment data, the next step is to determine the student's current level and future plans for transition into postsecondary life. Transition planning should focus on the areas of employment, education/training, and, when appropriate, independent living (Kohler & Field, 2003). The multidisciplinary team (MDT) must determine how to support the student in preparing for his or her postsecondary goals—taking into consideration the student's preferences and aspirations as well as family input. Person-centered planning is one way to begin this process. Transition assessment can be pivotal in person-centered planning in that it allows the MDT to evaluate the needs, preferences, and future goals for the student. Person-centered planning meetings enable the MDT to learn more about the student with the disability, and define how to effectively and efficiently create supports to assist students in obtaining future goals (Test et al., 2006).

Once transition assessment information has been gathered and reviewed, the next step is writing measurable postsecondary goals. A *postsecondary goal* reflects a young adult's aspirations for life after completing high school (Test et al., 2006). In order to meet IDEA requirements, a postsecondary goal for education, employment, and independent living (if necessary) should be written in measurable and observable terms (see item number one on the Indicator 13 checklist). Consider three questions when writing postsecondary goals:

1. Where is the student going to work or engage in productive activities after graduation?
2. Where and how is the student going to continue to learn and/or develop skills after graduation?
3. Where is the student going to live, and how is he or she going to access adult services, participate in

the community, and have fun after graduation?

Education goal areas may include (a) high school completion document or certificate class, (b) community or technical colleges, (c) compensatory educational programs, (d) college/university enrollment, (e) short-term education or employment training programs, or (f) vocational technical schools (NSTTAC, 2008). An example of a measurable postsecondary goal in the area of education is: "Upon graduation from high school, Jamarreo will attend Central Piedmont Community College and participate in the welding industry certificate program meeting the requirements to attain an Entry Level Welding Certificate" (NSTTAC, 2007a). This education/training goal is measurable for four reasons: (a) participation in training is the focus of the goal; (b) it is based on successful completion of a welding certificate, which is observable with Jamarreo either meeting coursework requirements or not; (c) the expectation or behavior is explicitly stated, because Jamarreo will attain the certificate or not; and (d) it is stated that training will occur after graduation. On the other hand, the goal "Jamarreo expects to learn about welding" would not have been measurable or explicit because it does not suggest that Jamarreo will complete the educational training and does not state a specific timeline for occurrence after graduation (NSTTAC, 2007a).

Employment goal areas may include competitive, supported, or sheltered employment. *Employment* means working in the competitive labor market performing on a full- or part-time basis in an integrated setting, and the individual is compensated at or above minimum wage (NSTTAC, 2008). *Supported employment* (e.g., customized employment, mobile work crew, enclave) is competitive work in integrated settings in which individuals with disabilities work with a job coach in an environment that is consistent with the individual's strengths, interests, and preferences (NSTTAC, 2008). *Sheltered employment* refers to an accredited occupationally oriented

facility, including work activity centers that employ individuals with disabilities and are certified under special provisions of federal minimum wage laws by the U.S. Department of Labor's Wage and Hour Division (NSTTAC, 2007b). Referring to Jamarreo again, an example of a measurable postsecondary goal in the area of employment would be: "After graduation from the local community college, Jamarreo will obtain a small business license and contract out his services as a welder in his uncle's shop." This employment goal is measurable because it occurs after high school, and the result is observable because it suggests Jamarreo will be self-employed as a welder. Alternatively, the goal "Jamarreo wants to be a welder" would not be measurable because there is no time-frame or specific outcome stated (NSTTAC, 2007a).

Independent living goal areas should include all skills that enhance an individual's ability to live independently (e.g., money management, home maintenance, community experiences, self-determination; Test et al., 2006). Cronin (1996) defined independent living as "those skills or tasks that contribute to the successful independent functioning of an individual into adulthood" (p. 54) in the following domains: leisure/recreation, home maintenance/personal care, and community participation. An example of a measurable goal for independent living would be: "After graduation, Jamarreo will maintain his hearing equipment by attending annual check ups with audiologist." This goal is measurable for four reasons: (a) the focus of the goal is acquisition of independent living skills; (b) the goal is stated in a manner that is measurable and observable (i.e., attending annual check-ups with audiologist); (c) the behavior is explicit; and (d) the goal occurs after graduation (NSTTAC, 2007a). The independent living goal "Jamarreo expects to maintain his hearing equipment with help from the audiologist" is not measurable because there is not an observable outcome, and it is not stated that the activity occurs after high school (NSTTAC, 2007a).

In summary, measurable postsecondary goals must (a) be observable and allow progress to be measured that leads to a future outcome (e.g., duration and timeframes clearly stated, success criteria included, use of action verbs); (b) describe an explicit skill or task for the individual to complete (e.g., enrolling in college courses, self-employment, participation in community based activities); and (c) occur after high school graduation (e.g., upon high school completion, in the future). Figure 3 provides a quick reference formula for writing measurable postsecondary goals.

Aligning Postsecondary Goals With Transition Services

After establishing measurable postsecondary goals, the MDT needs to consider transition services (see Indicator 13 Checklist Item 4). Based on a student's needs, strengths, interests, and preferences, transition services may include course of study, related services, community experiences, and possibly instruction in daily living or other life skill domains. For example, Jamarreo's postsecondary goal for education/training and employment is to successfully complete a welding course to earn an entry-level welding certificate. Specific transition services to support Jamarreo in obtaining this postsecondary goal could include job safety instruction, community-based instructional experiences related to construction or automotives, and work-based instruction with a local welder. Further, self-determination and social skills instruction also may be valuable transition services for Jamarreo. Finally, when planning for various types of transition services, it is important to include related support persons or agencies in the transition planning process to ensure appropriate services are provided to the student.

Aligning Annual IEP Goals With Transition Services and Postsecondary Goals

After developing measurable postsecondary goals and transition services for education/training, employment, and independent living (if necessary),

Figure 3. Formula for Writing a Postsecondary Goal

| | | | | |
|---|-----------|------|------------|-----------------|
| _____ | _____ | will | _____ | _____ |
| (After High School) (After graduation) (Upon completion of high school) | (Student) | | (behavior) | (where and how) |

the next step is to develop annual IEP goals that align with the postsecondary goals. The sixth item on the Indicator 13 checklist indicates that annual IEP goals must relate to the student’s transition service needs, which means they should be tied to the student’s postsecondary goals (NSTTAC, 2009). Again, these goals need to focus on how the student will access or complete the transition services, which will prepare them to meet their postsecondary goals in the outcome areas of education/training, employment, and independent living. When writing annual IEP goals, consider two questions:

- 1. What skills and knowledge must the student attain this academic year that are necessary for achieving the transition services identified to assist in obtaining postsecondary goals?
- 2. What skills and knowledge does the student currently have that support transition services and postsecondary goals?

To illustrate, an effective annual IEP goal for Jamarreo that aligns with his postsecondary goal for education and employment would be: “Given small group instruction on shop safety skills, a task analysis, and self-monitoring sheet, Jamarreo will demonstrate appropriate safety skills in shop class with 100% accuracy during the

duration of the IEP.” This annual IEP goal aligns with Jamarreo’s postsecondary goals because it can be accomplished while in school, at the same time preparing him for completing welding courses at the local community college. It also supports the transition services of job safety instruction

time (NSTTAC, 2007a). The goal (a) provides conditions (“Given explicit instruction on proper care and cleaning of a hearing aid, a task analysis, and weekly opportunities to practice”); (b) focuses on the behavior of cleaning his hearing aid, which can be directly measured; and (c) sets a crite-

Aligning annual IEP goals with transition services and postsecondary goals provides students the opportunity to acquire specific skills that will allow them to attain their postsecondary goals.

and community work experiences, which were identified in Jamarreo’s IEP to support his postsecondary employment and education goals (NSTTAC, 2007a).

An effective annual IEP goal for Jamarreo that aligns with his postsecondary independent living goal would be: “Given explicit instruction on proper care and cleaning of a hearing aid, a task analysis, and weekly opportunities to practice, Jamarreo will demonstrate the steps of the task analysis with 90% accuracy by the end of the school year.” This annual IEP goal aligns with the postsecondary goals and transition services because it is a skill Jamarreo will need to learn in order to maintain his hearing aid over

tion (“with 90% accuracy by the end of the school year”).

Aligning annual IEP goals with transition services and postsecondary goals provides students the opportunity to acquire specific skills that will allow them to attain their postsecondary goals (NSTTAC, 2008; Test et al., 2006). Each annual IEP goal should include (a) the condition in which the skill is going to be taught (i.e., teaching strategy); (b) a skill the student needs to learn (i.e., measurable behavior) in order to meet the postsecondary goal; (c) a set criterion; and (d) a specified timeframe for obtaining the goal. Figure 4 provides a quick reference formula for writing annual IEP goals.

Figure 4. Formula for Writing an Annual Goal

| | | | | |
|---|-----------|------|------------|---|
| Given _____ | _____ | will | _____ | _____ |
| condition (teaching strategies) (e.g., direct instruction modeling peer tutoring) | (Student) | | (behavior) | (criteria) (e.g., 3 out of 4 times 80%) |
| | | | | (timeframe) (by June 09) |

Final Thoughts

Transition planning is important in the life of students with disabilities. IDEA mandates that the transition planning process begin at the age of 16, but best practice suggests the process begin even earlier. Regardless of when the process begins, it is imperative that families, professionals, and anyone involved in the student's life understand that every student has aspirations for life after high school (Test et al., 2006). These aspirations include what we all strive for in life: employment, education, and the ability to live independently. Ongoing transition assessment is the primary key to ensuring student IEPs include appropriate, measurable postsecondary goals based on student strengths, needs, and preferences. Once measurable postsecondary goals have been identified, MDTs can develop transition services and annual IEP goals that provide students with the skills and knowledge needed to attain their goals for postsecondary life. Although the process can be time consuming, the end result is an individual prepared to lead a productive, independent, fulfilling adult life.

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